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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION THAI ELECTION - TOKYO

LEAD STORIES: Most Tuesday morning papers front-paged reports claiming that support is growing within the main opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) for former deputy leader Ichiro Ozawa to take over the party's top job from outgoing leader Seiji Maehara.

¶1. "Thai Premier Thaksin's Empty Victory" An editorial in the business daily Nihon Keizai commented (4/4): "The general election in Thailand that was a referendum on Prime Minister Thaksin's leadership came to an empty end. Although Thaksin won the election, the political situation remains chaotic. The prime minister has expressed his intention to form a coalition government with opposition parties or create a neutral arbitration committee to mediate the situation.... Support for Thaksin is split, as middle-class urbanites are critical of what they call his autocratic methods and questionable stock dealings by members of his family, while lower-income rural residents strongly support the premier....

¶2. "While Thaksin's party waged an uphill battle in Bangkok and southern Thailand, it gained overwhelming support in the farming villages in the northern and northeastern parts of the country. As a core member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which is promoting economic integration in the region, Thailand has placed great importance on multinational industries from advanced countries. A massive amount of foreign direct investment, especially from Japan, has supported the Thai economy, and a major premise of this investment has been political stability. Allegations of Premier Thaksin's corruption and the high-handed manner in which the election was held have deepened the social fissures in Thailand, a country that already has a wide income gap. We hope that Premier Thaksin will move to quickly

restore stability through dialogue with the opposition before the situation has a serious impact on the country's economy."

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